

A CHECKLIST OF TIME USE PROBLEMS

If you're like a typical college student, you've had occasional difficulty with time management. With the college routine of term paper deadlines, lab quizzes, group project presentations and exams, it is a lot to manage. If you were to graph your time spent in studying, you would probably find a rise in the time spent just before each deadline.

College students must learn early on that it is essential to meet time commitments in order to survive in the system. Cramming or working at the last minute is usually anxiety-producing and often not very effective. At the beginning of each semester, most students resolve to spread out their work better so as to avoid the "all nighters," but they're not always successful with their intentions.

Below is a checklist of questions and information about time use. It will give you some hints and direction to help you follow through on managing study time better. To best utilize this checklist, record your answer to each question, then read the suggestions and think about how it applies to you.

1. How long does it take you to get warmed up for study? _____ minutes

Do you lose time in getting started? Many students have problems getting down to the books. They get discouraged if they can't flop down in a chair and start thinking instantly. But some activities require greater "warm up" time than others. For example, studying a foreign language – learning vocabulary, translating and doing exercises – may require more warm-up time than reading through a history chapter. It may take even longer to get warmed up to writing an essay. When you plan study time, don't forget to figure in the time it takes you to warm up to the task.

2. What time of the day do you study best? _____ morning _____ midday _____ evening

When are you most alert and effective? When do you read fastest? When is your enthusiasm highest? Observe your habits and keep a brief diary to find out. Then plan accordingly. Some students function better in the wee hours, while others are actually more effective shortly after dinner. Forcing yourself to study late at night if you are an early bird type leads to fatigue and wheel-spinning. Setting unreasonable goals like, "I'll get up at 6:30 a.m. on Saturday to start studying" makes for difficulties unless you can really stick to it. Be realistic about yourself in selecting your times to study.

3. Do you usually plan what to study first? _____ yes _____ no

Do you lose time through disorganization? Are you uncertain as to what you're going to accomplish in your study time? Do you try to handle too many kinds of activities or cover too many different problems in one evening? Do you grab the first book that is handy rather than start out by systematically planning what courses you should study for and what you want to accomplish? Often it is a good idea to study the most difficult or boring course first. Then, after you've completed your first task, reward yourself by turning to the one you find more enjoyable.

4. Do you skim a book before you study? _____ always _____ occasionally _____ never

Do you screen your reading materials to weed out unnecessary or unproductive matter? Many students, faced with long reading lists, start plodding through book #1, then maybe finish two out of six books and feel guilty that they have not managed to get through the other books. They give up and hope for luck on the exams. Developing effective skimming and scanning techniques would enable them to get the major

concepts from all of the books. If you can skim for main ideas and later review them carefully, in more depth, you will be effective and retain more. Practice rapid reading techniques to improve your speed and comprehension. Put pressure on yourself. You will get more ideas in less time.

5. What do you usually do when you hit a study “wall?” keep working change jobs

Do you ever work so long on a problem that you’re mentally wheel-spinning, getting nowhere? You might get tense, even panicky, when the answer does not come. If that happens or if you are fatigued, it is better to change to some other activity rather than continue forcing yourself to keep going. If you’re stuck on a problem, change activities, then return to the problem later. You will find you can usually solve it more quickly after a break, thus using your time more effectively.

6. Do you make outlines for all your writing? yes no

To use your time more efficiently, create an outline before starting to write term papers or reports. Make a more detailed outline of the thesis you are attempting to prove, making sure your major concept is clear before you start writing. Also, when answering essay questions on tests, take a few minutes to jot down the major points you are going to cover.

7. Describe one change you can make to be more efficient in your study methods.

Can you streamline your studying by cutting out non-essentials? Eliminate any work done out of habit that no longer serves any useful purpose. For example, copying all the major terms or concepts from the textbook to your notebook, and then retyping all class notes may take too much of your time. Perhaps you can combine both sets of notes. Leave every other page blank so that you can make notes from reading your text to fill in the gaps or to expand on points of information brought up in class.

8. Do you stick to your study priorities once you establish them? yes no

Do you lose time to distractions? Do you sacrifice prime studying time to other lesser priorities? For example, are you using prime morning hours, when you are feeling the freshest, to do laundry? How about doing the laundry after classes, when you’re too tired to tackle anything constructive. Always keep your priorities in mind and use self-discipline.

*Would you like more assistance with managing your time or with improving your study skills?
Contact AU Counseling Services at 630-844-5118 or the Center for Teaching & Learning at 630-844-5520.*